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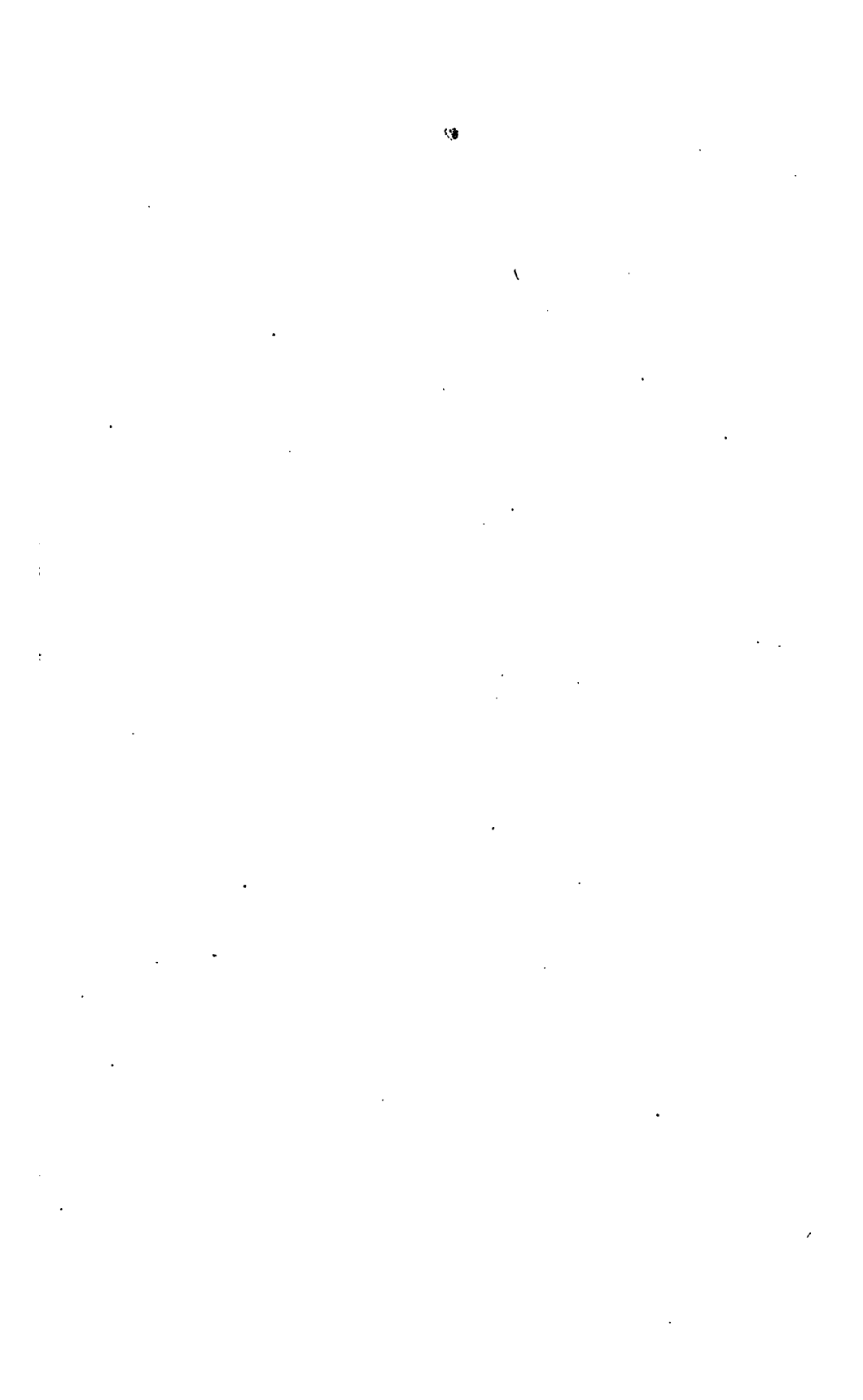
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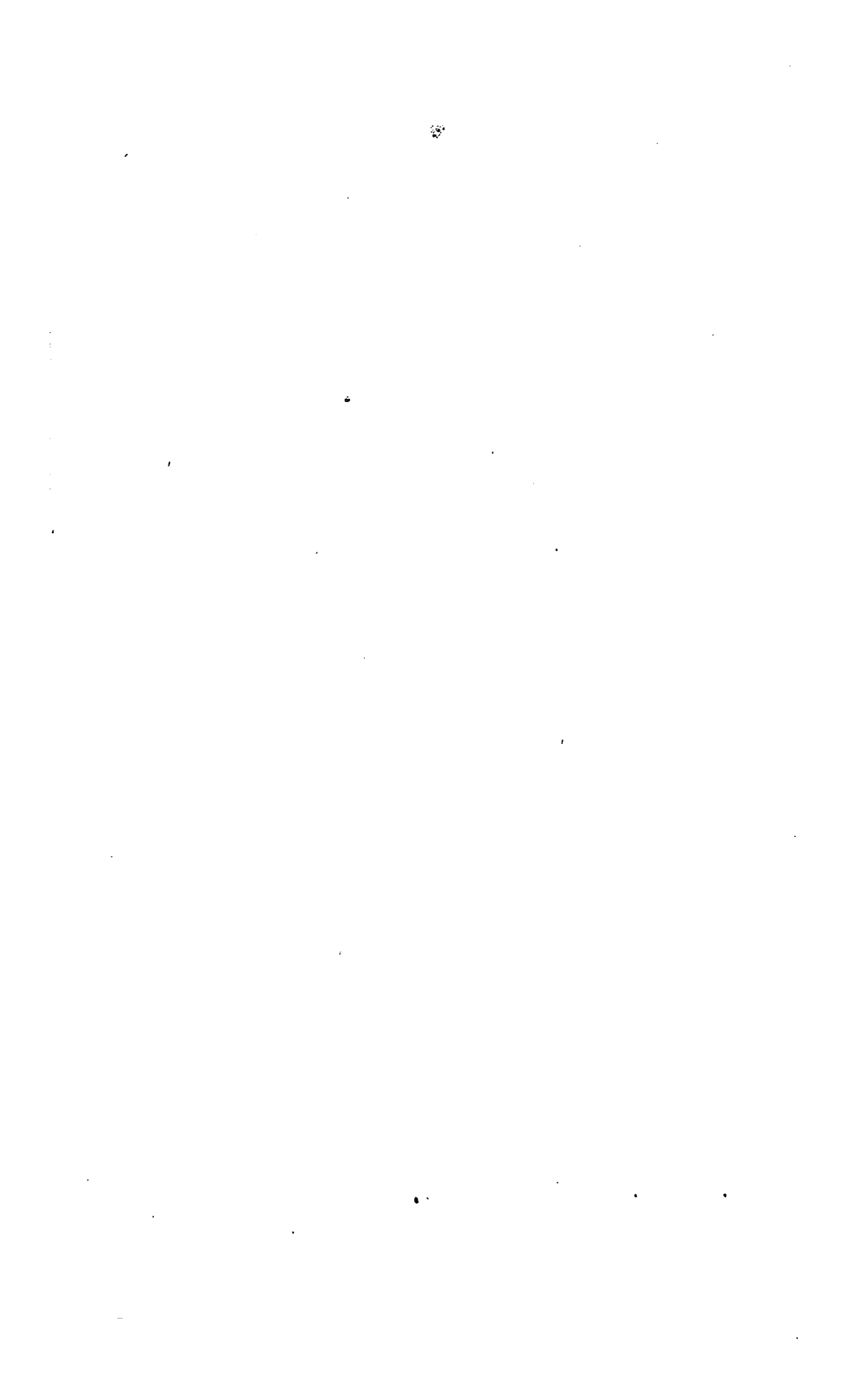
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ADULT SCHOOLS.

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A Letter

TO

THE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH

ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

ADULT SCHOOLS

IN

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS.

BY A COUNTRY CURATE.

London:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

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## LETTER.

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MY LORD,

To extend the advantages of Education in agricultural districts, to improve the moral, and as a consequence, the physical condition of the labouring classes, and to combat a popular fallacy, is the object of this letter.

It would be futile to prove that the advancement of education has been most rapid of late years. And nowhere, my Lord, has that advancement been more striking than in this Diocese. Nobly and successfully did your Lordship's predecessor "ride on the crest of that great wave of social improvement, which during the last thirty or forty years has been spreading over our land."\* Animated by him, the education of the poor remained no longer a mere form, carried on in dames' schools, or in a few National Schools conducted on antiquated systems; but it received an impetus, and imbibed a spirit which is sensibly apparent. School-houses have sprung up in all

\* Funeral Sermon, by the Dean of Norwich.

quarters, and the instruction afforded at them is now, generally speaking, of a superior character. The Training Institution, called into existence by Bishop Stanley, has sent out teachers well qualified for their task, and it offers opportunities and incentives which are every day more and more appreciated. From this, as from other Diocesan Institutions of a similar character, will now radiate the most approved theory of popular education combined with the most successful practice.

Thus far all is well. The provision made to secure effectiveness in teachers will greatly enhance the efforts of the clergy, in introducing a sounder system of education into their parishes. And, without being too sanguine, we may hope, that the time is not far distant when, in every parish where it is possible, we shall see not only a National School, but that school conducted by an efficient teacher.

But a question arises—Excellent as may be the education imparted at National Schools, and however well adapted for the training of early youth, is it sufficient to qualify the *man* for his sphere of duty in after life? Granting that for the girl, who remains until a later age than the boy, and who after leaving school is generally under supervision and control, this education may be sufficient; surely it is not enough for the boy. I am almost afraid to say how long the education of the boy really lasts. Considering the many interruptions he meets with, by being taken from school at certain seasons for petty agricultural employments, the time consumed in re-

gaining what he has forgotten on these occasions—the early period at which he leaves school entirely, that he may add his mite, however small, to the family income—his time of education is indeed sadly limited. He leaves school with little of learning but the letter; his acquirements are little more than mechanical, and, in consequence of his youth, they have as yet had but little influence either upon his understanding or his heart.

This being the state of a boy's education on leaving the National School, how defective must it be in those districts where, from the smallness of the population or from the poverty of the neighbourhood, National Schools cannot be planted, and where the only opportunities afforded for instruction are those of the seldom-recurring Sunday School, and the inefficient teaching of the dame!

The career of the boy, after leaving school, may be briefly traced. As time advances his liberty of action is less constrained. Disengaged hours are at first spent in idle gossip with older and less reputable characters than himself. The most vicious form which this evil presents to the eye of society, is that group which is seen in some corner of almost every parish on the Lord's-day; and it were painful to paint the picture which that Sabbath-desecrating group presents. Time goes on, wages increase, and the youth fancies himself a man. Disengaged hours now fly for excitement to the public-house; and years pass away, with nothing to show for them but bad habits, forgotten knowledge, and an empty purse. But this does not

last for ever. Marriage is the next step in the career : a marriage generally contracted too early for prudence—oftentimes, alas ! too late for morality. And now commences a new scene,—the man for the most part generally reformed, indeed, but struggling hard against the ills of life. Now his former prodigality and his present ignorance press heavily upon him. His wife and children must be fed ; but he and poverty are inseparable companions. These real troubles touch his heart. Religion and prudence present themselves to his thoughts ; but how are they manifested in his actions ? His ignorance is now his bane. The comprehensive and beautiful Prayers of the Church, and the calm and pure exposition of the Gospel by her ministers, have no attraction for him ; and simply because he cannot understand them. And what is the result ? He seeks more stimulating food, and of that, in this Diocese at least, there is no lack. To enumerate and compare the attractions which the different denominations present to the poor would be invidious and useless. We must in common honesty admit that some have effected great reformatiions ; but too often is the spiritual charge of their souls surrendered by these ignorant ones to no other cure than that of the ranting preacher.

I spoke of prudence also, but how is this manifested ? Here a very virtue is through ignorance made a cause of misery and sin. The club, with all its temptations and all its fallacies, offers its allurements in the shape of benefits—those of medical attendance and pecuniary assistance during

sickness ; allowance for burial ; and, in some cases, of provision for old age : but how dearly is all this paid for, and how much misery does it entail ! To say nothing of the improvidence and the fallacy of joining institutions, the very rules of which compel the disbursement of an exorbitant per-centage of the monthly subscription for another purpose than that of the provident object in view, what a grievous temptation is presented ! But, my Lord, I will not myself enlarge upon this matter. I submit to your Lordship extracts from the "Articles and Orders" of a local club, (a fair specimen of its genus, because taken from others) which will speak for themselves.

"Every member of this society shall pay, or cause to be paid, one shilling every meeting night into the box, and spend fourpence for beer to be drunk by the members present, and twopence each meeting for the feast."

"Every member attending the deceased to the grave shall spend sixpence at the house where the stock is kept, to be paid out of the common stock."

"Every member that is summoned on a general meeting shall spend fourpence, whether absent or present, to be drunk by the members present ; that fourpence to be paid the next meeting, besides their usual pay."

But, my Lord, the mischief does not end with this forced expenditure. At these monthly meetings, and on these funereal occasions, far more is spent than the club compels, and the last Saturday night, or rather Sabbath morn of each month, is made the periodical occasion of disgusting

drunkenness and disturbance in the locality, of misery to each individual transgressor, and also to his wife and family at home. The yearly feast, again, in many cases, extends its pernicious influence not only over the appointed day, but entails idleness and dissipation for some time afterwards.

But, with all this so-called prudence, what is the end of the labouring man? After a certain age his labour is of less and less value, and his wages proportionally diminish. At last two alternatives present themselves—in the case of the respectable and industrious, an out-door allowance; in that of the profligate, the Union. What, I would ask is the average per-centage of agricultural labourers who die without having received parochial relief in the one or the other shape?

My Lord, the above sketch is not exaggerated. There may be a few exceptional cases where the description does not to the full extent hold true. There may be parishes with zealous incumbents, backed by earnest landlords and the co-operation of tenant-farmers, where a different aspect presents itself. But take the agricultural districts in the main, and my sketch will be found accurate.

And now to provide a remedy for this state of society amongst the labouring classes; and I propose the general adoption of one, simple in its machinery, successful in its working, and inexpensive in its cost, because entirely or nearly self-supporting; and, above all, a remedy the adoption of which is in the power of every village pastor in the

kingdom. I mean the establishment of Evening Adult Schools in Agricultural Districts.

And this brings me to a popular fallacy I propose to combat: viz., "that there is little or no hope of being able to make an impression on the present generation; and that the only prospect of elevating the lower classes, is by the education of the young." How often do we hear this sentiment from the lips of hard-working and pious clergymen! and the more extensive and destitute their charge, the more mournfully and frequently is it uttered. There is indeed the proviso, that in cases of illness or deep distress reformatations are sometimes effected, but that these are often only temporary. To show how this fallacy prevails, even with the most intelligent and experienced, I quote two passages from a work by, perhaps, the most sanguine, able, and successful educationist of the day: "Suggestive Hints on Secular Education," by the Rev. Richard Dawes.

"Increased experience has confirmed what I then stated: that the better the labouring classes are educated, the better they will become in all the moral relations of life; *and that no great improvement can be effected in the manners of the people, but by the education of the rising generation.*"

Again: "*It is difficult, if not impossible, to change the habits of men whose characters are formed and settled. The prejudice and ignorance that have grown up with them will not yield to new impressions, whilst youth and innocence may be moulded to any form you may choose to give them.*"

This wholesale conclusion about the hopelessness of elevating the present generation is altogether fallacious. A brief note, appended to this letter, will show how readily and eagerly even the most ignorant will embrace an opportunity of receiving instruction if offered—how perseveringly they will pursue it, and how rapidly they are improved by it.

But the ease with which such institutions can be started and carried on is a most powerful argument in their favour. It is not every parish that can build a National School-house, and support a teacher. In some districts, many parishes combined would be unable to do so. Most clergymen are aware too of the anxiety, unpleasantness, and difficulty attending a laboured annual subscription. But in the Adult School no such hindrances exist. The Clergyman should be his own schoolmaster. In every parish one good-sized room could be secured, at a trifling rent, for three evenings in the week. In every parish, also, some well-intentioned inhabitant may be found to aid the Clergyman in his labour; and also some more advanced pupil, who, for a trifling remuneration, will, by acting as monitor, take the elementary drudgery off his hands. And is it asking too much of the Parish Priest to give up a small portion of three evenings of the week, during one half of the year, to the welfare of his flock? And this is quite sufficient; for the rapidity of the adult's progress is surprising. However considerable may be the personal inconvenience caused by this surrender of time, it will be

amply repaid by the satisfaction arising from duty performed and from the good effected.

Again, what a benefit would be conferred, not only on the flock, but also on the pastor, by these constant meetings. The difficulty of obtaining intercourse with the men of an agricultural parish is very great, and not to be met by ordinary pastoral visitation. When the Minister calls, they are at work or at meals. But in the Evening School what an opportunity presents itself for the kind inquiry, the gentle admonition, the individual or collective exhortation!

The course of instruction which these institutions should embrace, must mainly depend upon the existing state of knowledge in the particular locality, and on certain other circumstances. But I fear, my Lord, that in most districts where National Schools are of recent growth, popular ignorance is most alarming, and that the very elements of knowledge must be first imparted. This foundation once laid, in religious progress, much will depend, under God's blessing, upon the efforts and piety of the teacher, whether, having imparted "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," he will be able to carry them "on unto perfection." Again, in secular knowledge, all will depend upon his ability, enthusiasm, and perseverance. Surely he should not be satisfied with the mere power of reading, writing, and figuring. Some taste for elevating literature should be cultivated—some knowledge of elementary science conveyed—some principles of art instilled. Might

not the labourer go forth to his daily toil with more interest, if made acquainted with those leading properties of the soil he cultivates and of the atmosphere he breathes, which a Davy has enunciated and experimentalized upon, a Liebig proved, and a Johnson made intelligible? Might not the man, where labour is a drug and where population is excessive, be taught that there are other fair though distant lands where labour is wealth, where children would not be to him an anxiety and a bane, but blessings to be prayed for; and where, under the same strict laws which govern his own country, but under a less rigorous competition, he might find that happiness and competency he vainly fights for at home? Surely all these things might be taught to his soul's advantage, and to his temporal happiness and prosperity.

And, my Lord, how is the introduction of such institutions, where such advantages are offered, to be effected? By no one, my Lord, could this object be undertaken with a higher prospect of success than by yourself. Called to preside over a Diocese where so much has been done, but still more is left undone, every word which falls from your Lordship will be listened to with intense eagerness. The time is not far distant when you will officially supervise your Diocese and exhort and counsel your Clergy. On that occasion, a high reputation for learning and theological acquirement will give weight to all you may advance on the particular controversies which at present agitate the public mind. But in your Lordship, high as your repu-

tation for erudition may be, we recognize far more than the learning of the cloister. From whom would an appeal to the Clergy to extend the blessing of an enlightened education to the poorer classes by their own personal labours be listened to more respectfully, and by whom could it be made more gracefully than by one who has himself been a bright example of laborious and successful exertion, not only in his own country, but in foreign lands? My Lord, that you may, under God's blessing, be equally instrumental in dispelling darkness, ignorance, and ungodliness at home, is the earnest hope and prayer of,

Your faithful Servant,

A COUNTRY CURATE.

To the Right Reverend

The Lord Bishop of Norwich.

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*Note.*—The Author of these pages entered upon the Curacy of two parishes in this Diocese in October. Though for the education of the rising generation of the poor of both parishes ample provision has been made for some years past, the older inhabitants, as in most parts of this Diocese, are lamentably ignorant. To remedy this, Adult Evening Schools, meeting three times a week, were established in both parishes, the management of which was confided to the Author. They met for the first time on the 3rd and 4th of December. At Parish A, the number on the first night was 11; at Parish B, 10. After

the third week, the numbers greatly increased ; and the average attendance for some time has been nearly 27 at Parish A, and nearly 40 at Parish B. The extent of knowledge at these Schools is of a most elementary nature. At Parish A, not more than 3 or 4 can read with fluency. At B, the first class, containing 14 or 15, read fairly ; the second class, imperfectly ; and some in the third class cannot read at all. Writing and arithmetic are in the same elementary state.

But a gratifying feature presents itself, in the high promise which these schools afford. The payments, for which no credit is allowed, are willingly made ; the desire to improve is most eager ; and the advancement is most rapid. Men who could not read a word, can now read and spell ; some who had never formed a letter, can now write neatly on paper. In the first class at Parish B, men who could read on after a fashion, but not spell, nor bear to be questioned, can now spell well, and answer questions arising from the subject, readily and with gusto. They are, indeed, most eager to obtain knowledge, and in most cases they endeavour on off nights to improve themselves at home. The interest too, comparatively unfelt before, which they take in the progress of their children or relations at the National Schools, is most pleasing and valuable.

I might here state my firm conviction, that had the study of vocal music been introduced (which a local circumstance forbade) the numbers would have been far greater. As it is, I have good reason for expecting that the following winter will witness a more numerous attendance, even without such a popular inducement.

At Parish B, almost all of those who are not necessarily engaged, meet between services on the Sunday : though no one is then present but themselves, they are most orderly and assiduous under the conduct of the monitors. They afterwards proceed to Church. Attendance on the Sunday is quite optional.

The following is an analysis of the ages of the Adults at Parish B :

1 above 40	4 above 25
8 „ 30	11 „ 20
15 above 16	

But how is all this acting towards improving the physical condition of the labouring classes ?

At the same time were commenced a Horticultural Society for the encouragement of cottage gardening, and also a Lending Library. Both of these now bid fair to prosper. Many of the adults are already members of the lending library, and many more will join when their acquirements will warrant the step. Thus sound instruction and rational amusement are provided at their own homes. Arithmetical knowledge is also conveyed, with the definitive object of advancing the economical disbursement of limited means.

Above all, that curse of the agricultural districts, the club, will now be gradually abolished by means of these schools. One sound Friendly Society will soon rise up out of the ruins of various public-house clubs, which are established one year to break up and divide assets the next ; then to start afresh to be broken up again.

The above is no trifle to advance for the operations of an adult school during one brief season. If following winters effect as much, may we not expect great things from the general establishment of such institutions in agricultural districts ?

Lastly, much might I say respecting individual reformatations, which are gradually working their way ; but as many belonging to these schools may read this letter, it would be invidious to enter into specific details.

May many Adult Schools spring up in this Diocese, and throughout the kingdom ; and may all effect the improvement which these have, by God's blessing, already effected, and will I am persuaded continue to effect, if carried on with a view to His glory and man's welfare.

March 12th, 1850.

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